Envelopes, Please, for the Equal Rites Awards

Ellen Goodman

BOSTON — Every year, in memory of my historic foremothers, I celebrate Aug. 26, anniversary of the passage of women's suffrage, by recognizing those who have done their utmost in the past 12 months to slow the progress of women.

This annual event, known as the Equal Rites Award ceremony, stirs butterflies in the stomachs of finalists, and competitive fever among those who push their favorite candidates. Once again our one-woman jury had the delicious task of sifting through dozens of entries to find the gems. Now, the envelopes please.

The highest prize, The Ms-Anthropic Man of the Year Award, was won easily this year by a real gem of a gent, "Diamond Don" Regan. It was Diamond Don who said at the Geneva summit last fall that women are "not going to understand throw weights." He then divested himself of all good sense, explaining our South African policy this way: "Are the women of America prepared to give up all their jewelry?" To Diamond Don we send one charm — a Minuteman II missile whose throw weight has been calculated at 3,628,000 carats — attached to a neck chain to wear at the White House.

Ferdinand Marcos, another leading contender, will have to settle for The Chivalrous Chauvinist Award. It was Marcos who said that he was "embarrassed" to be running against a woman. "It's better if it's a man. If it's a woman it might lead to something bad." Like defeat. Marcos' award is not accompanied by a prize because he already has Imelda. Who could ask for anything more?

The Ms-Match Maker Award, an attractive panic button with shocking voltage, goes to Newsweek magazine for its doomsday cover story, noting that a single woman over 40 was more likely to get killed by a terrorist than to get married.

While we are on the subject, the Maternal Understatement of the Year Award must go to the mother of Anne Marie Murphy, the pregnant Dublin woman who was put on a plane with a special going-away gift — a bomb — by her alleged terrorist beau, Nezar Hindawi. Said Mom, "I do not think very much of this boyfriend." To this fussy Mom we send the Newsweek cover suitable for framing.

The Raging Hormonal Imbalance Award, which has often gone to male members of the medical establishment, this year passes to Dr. Richard Restak. The neurologist has come up with a solution to the medical-care crisis: encourage more women to go into medicine because they are "cheaper" and "compliant." To Dr. Restak we send a copy of his own book, "The Brain," and humbly suggest that he use it.

The Fatherhood Is A Snap Award goes to an Escondido, Calif., man, Bob Edwards, who wasn't aware of his wife's most recent pregnancy or delivery. "We were in the living room playing with the toys.... She was in the bathroom having a baby. I wonder, how did I miss that?" said Poppa Bob.

The Reverse Discrimination Prize, a vehicle that only goes backwards, is awarded to Gerard D'Amico, a candidate for lieutenant governor of Massachusetts. D'Amico is running against Evelyn Murphy in a state that has never elected a Democratic woman to statewide office. But...D'Amico says, he hopes people will vote for him despite his sex.

Even in this quiescent year, we found a group of protesters for the Dubious Equality Award. They are seven women who marched topless in Rochester, N.Y., to protest a state law that allows men but not women to take off their shirts. To the Rochester Seven we send T-shirts commemorating the event.

As another well-dressed special, we have awarded a Designer Cancer Prize to Yves St. Laurent, who put his name and image on Ritz cigarettes to woo women into taking their equal place in the cancer wards. To St. Laurent we send a nicely stitched copy of statistics that show nearly twice as many college women as men smoke cigarettes daily.

Another award heading overseas is The International Backlash. Wrapped neatly in a chador, it goes to the president of Iran, who refused to attend a Zimbabwe dinner in his honor because there were women, including cabinet ministers, at the table.

The Hometown Ayatollah Prize goes to Bishop Anthony Bevilaqua of Pittsburgh. He decreed that women couldn't have their feet washed on Holy Thursday because no women had their feet washed at the original last supper.

The G-String for Gratuitous Sex, fought after by so many rock stars over the years, goes to an L.A. group heavy on the metal and light on the mental: Motley Crue. According to the record company's bio, "When asked to name an incident that typifies the band, they point to the night in Dallas that a doctor lined them up and gave them double doses of penicillin."

Finally the Dancing in the Dark Ages Prize goes to State Sen. John DeCamp in Nebraska where, for the first time, the race for governor is between two women. DeCamp, who called it a "state prom queen contest," will be sent a dance card. Blank.

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